

March 16, 2006

NEWS For Immediate Release NEWS

Winter Muskox Season Extension on Nunivak Island in Unit 18 Announced by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game announces an extension of the winter season for muskox hunting on Nunivak Island in Unit 18. The season will be extended until March 31, 2006 to satisfy the finding of emergency adopted by the Board of Game during its Spring Meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska. The extended season will allow hunting opportunity for drawing and registration permittees who were unable to access the hunt area due to poor weather and an unusable runway at the Mekoryuk airport for more than 10 days prior to end of the general season on March 15, 2006. All other muskox seasons and bag limits in Unit 18 remain unchanged and are not affected by this emergency order.

A series of events has resulted in hunters being unable to access the airport at Mekoryuk in order to hunt in the Nunivak Island spring muskox hunt which occurs from Feb. 1 – March 15. The weather this month has been very poor for travel both to the island from Bethel, and on the island by snowmobile. The runway was unusable from March 2 until March 8 due to mechanical breakdowns of the airport maintenance equipment.

Through March 15, 2006, approximately 70 muskoxen have been harvested for 90 permits issued for Nunivak Island hunts. Extending the season for both the drawing and registration hunt would probably increase this harvest by 10 to 15 animals. The number of muskox on Nunivak Island has been slowly increasing in spite of heavy harvest of both bulls and cows. The current population is about 650 animals and is above the population management goal of 590-640. We are currently issuing 45 bull and 45 cow permits per year and are not able to cap the population growth despite high hunter success rates with harvests between 85 - 90 animals per year for the last 5 years. At the November 2005 Board of Game meeting, the Board increased the number of permits available for these hunts to allow the department the flexibility to increase the harvest of muskox on the island, but that change was not effective for this season.

Extending the hunting season until March 31 on Nunivak Island will not result in an over-harvest of muskox, as the harvest is regulated by permit. In addition, the harvest is necessary to prevent the herd from further increasing above management objectives. The department will continue to monitor the hunt in accordance with its sustained yield obligations.

For Additional Information, Contact:

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